

The safeguarding of the linguistic diversity in Europe is one of the most often declared tasks of the EU. It not only supports different programs, institutions and networks of researchers and practitioners working on behalf of minority languages but also conducts campaigns dedicated to raising awareness of the multilingual nature and cultural and linguistic diversity of Europe. Most of the European states, including Poland, provide support to recognized autochthonous languages on their territory. Minority and regional languages are protected by internal State legal acts and international conventions, such as the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which entered into force in 1998 and was ratified by Poland in 2009. However, when compared to the scale of the entire European continent, officially recognized languages represent only a small percentage of the total of language varieties in use. Unrecognized forms, both those that are perceived as languages and those treated as dialects of the state language, in most cases hardly receive support. In addition, their users encounter various – social, cultural and political – obstacles when using them in the public sphere or when claiming recognition for these languages. The language varieties classified as dialects (which are called collateral languages within this project) are almost never mentioned in the advantages of multilingualism debate and linguistic diversity protection in Europe. However, the activities undertaken all around the continent in order to protect and revitalize minority languages, and accompanying discourses on language endangerment, have led to an increase in people's language consciousness. In many cases, it helps to embark on the necessary steps in assuring the status of those languages. Such processes influence the shape of those languages as well as the collective identity of their users.

The project aims to investigate the current situation of collateral languages – those that belong to the same language family as the state language, are largely mutually intelligible and most often considered to be the dialects of the dominant language – as well as the influence for actions undertaken on behalf of these languages in shaping the collective identity of their speakers. The research will be carried out in Poland. It will concern five areas, very diverse in terms of the degree of use of local languages, the level of their codification and the cultural and linguistic awareness of their users. These are Masuria, Podlachia, Podhale, Silesia and Kashubia. From among these language varieties, only Kashubian has recently gained the status of a regional language and will serve as a point of reference and comparison for the others.

Collateral languages function primarily orally, and the process of their codification is in its early stages. Since Europe is a highly literacy-oriented continent and writing and related institutions are tools for protecting languages, we hypothesize that their illiteracy is the reason why they are not recognized as part of the continent's linguistic diversity. Therefore, communities seeking to protect their languages undertake activities aimed at codifying them. Meanwhile, all activities related to a language affect the users themselves, their perception of the relationship with other speakers, and thus the creation of a collective identity. This means that intra-linguistic activities have significant extra-linguistic – social consequences.

The research we will undertake covers many areas: languages; speakers of these languages – their attitudes, beliefs and linguistic practices; factors that influence the status of these languages – mainly linguistic ideologies; the character and type of actions undertaken on behalf of these languages and the actions produced by the discourse of language activists – language policy and planning; social processes, especially movements for the preservation and recognition of languages, which are a type of social movements. This complex, trans-disciplinary research requires the use of many different research methods, combining quantitative and qualitative research. We will, therefore, examine the current state of collateral languages in Poland using the questionnaire of ethnolinguistic vitality. The statistical research will be supplemented by participant observations and in-depth interviews with representatives of these groups. Based on this research, we will verify what factors and beliefs (linguistic ideologies) influence the vitality of these languages. We will follow the actions undertaken for these languages, focusing in particular on their standardization process and the resulting consequences (linguistic research, but also media analysis will be of help here). Another area of research will be language policy and the activities undertaken by the local activists in each of these areas (discourse analysis studies based on interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, media analysis). Each of the selected areas will be subject to a comprehensive analysis, and in the final stage of the work a comparative analysis will be provided and conclusions of a general nature will be drawn regarding the vitality of collateral languages and the relationship between language and linguistic processes and the collective identity of the community concerned.

The research carried out this way will make it possible to understand the functioning and resonance of languages as part of social life and thus will significantly influence the development of sociolinguistics. The research results will be presented in the form of a series of scientific and popular science articles, in two multi-author monographs, and in presentations for recipients from the world of science and persons affected by these problems.